



# Community Safety

## City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

Safety and security are important determinants of peoples' health and wellbeing. Overall, Port Phillip residents have a sense of safety and security that is comparable with the Victorian average. However, criminal incidents are persistently more common in Port Phillip than Victoria overall. No one organisation can solve complex safety issues in isolation.

### What is community safety?

*Community safety refers to when all sections or groups in an area feel comfortable and secure in their environment, where they can live, work, and travel freely. This can be achieved through policies, program and actions by multiple stakeholders, including governments, police and individuals.*

### How do community safety issues affect the Port Phillip community?

#### 1. Views on safety within Port Phillip

Council's annual community survey indicates that residents have an overall sense of safety and security (City of Port Phillip, 2022). However additional studies have suggested there is room for improvement in some areas (Monash University XYX Lab, 2021).

VicHealth's 2015 Indicators Survey found that 95.5 per cent of Port Phillip residents reported feeling that they were safe walking alone during the day, relatively close to the Victorian estimate of 92.5 per cent. Almost two-thirds (64.9 per cent) of residents reported feeling that they were safe walking alone in their local area after dark, which is greater than the Victorian estimate of 55.1 per cent. Between the 2007, 2011 and 2015 editions of this survey, there has been no significant difference in perceptions of safety in the City of Port Phillip (VicHealth, 2015).

To inform priorities and actions to be contained within the current City of Port Phillip Community Safety Plan, consultation took place in 2019 with over 140 local organisations to identify their community safety concerns. Council was advised that:

- **The "look and feel" of the community contributes to safety:** Appropriate lighting, and passive surveillance (having other people around) helps residents to feel safe when walking at night and while at transport hubs.
- **Theft is a concern for residents:** Residents feared property, bike and car theft.
- **Unsafe driver behaviour is contributing to road safety concerns:** Traffic speeds and illegal behaviour in local streets can put pedestrian and bike rider safety at risk.



- **Connected communities feel safer:** Residents feel safer when they know their neighbours and want opportunities to connect with others.
- **Diversity is celebrated:** Residents are proud of the diversity in Port Phillip and see it as a major community strength that should be celebrated.
- **Access to housing and support increases safety.** Residents want those who are sleeping rough to be supported to access housing.
- **Support for vulnerable groups is important to creating safer communities.** Residents believe that support needs to be provided to street-based sex workers, homeless people, those in insecure housing and older citizens identified at risk of elder abuse.
- **Responsible pet ownership is important to residents and visitors.** Residents feel unsafe around dogs off leash behaving aggressively.
- **People are concerned about impacts of alcohol and drug use.** Residents see the impact of drug and alcohol misuse on the community.

## 2. Crime within the City of Port Phillip

Data from the Crime Statistics Agency shows that:

- The rates of criminal incidents in Port Phillip have been consistently higher than the Victorian average over the past ten years. In 2022, at the criminal incident rate per 100,000 population, Port Phillip's rate was 9107.2, compared to the Victorian average of 5217.5.
- For the year ending in September 2022, there were a total of 9400 criminal incidents in Port Phillip, a 2.4 per cent decrease compared to the previous year. Out of these, 60.4 per cent remain unsolved, 12.8 per cent resulted in no charges and 26.8 per cent resulted in charges being laid.
- In this year, the top 5 location types for criminal incidents were a street/lane/footpath (2683 incidents), flat/unit/apartment (1585, a slight increase from the previous year), house (867), carpark multi dwelling (595, increased from the previous year) and other retail (328, also an increase from the previous year).
- Also in this year, the top 5 suburbs with the most criminal incidents were St Kilda (3083 incidents), South Melbourne (1765), Port Melbourne (1366), Elwood (706) and St Kilda East (489).
- The top 5 principal offence subgroups were stealing from a motor vehicle (1736 incidents), other theft (1016), criminal damage (636), theft of a bicycle (56) and residential non-aggravated burglary (530).
- Alleged offender incidents have decreased since 2020, with a 12.6 per cent decrease between 2021 and 2022. The most prevalent alleged offender age group was 45+ and males were much more likely to offend, with 2481 male alleged offenders and 633 female alleged offenders.
- The total number of victim reports for the year ending September 2022 has had a 0.9 per cent increase from the previous year, going from 7825 to 7894. The victimisation rate per 100,000 population has been consistently higher than the Victorian average since 2013. In



2022, this rate was 6118.3 in Port Phillip, compared to the Victorian average of 3022.4 (Crime Statistics Agency, 2022).

In relation to family violence:

- While Port Phillip's incidence of family violence has been below the Victorian average since 2018, rates have been increasing in that time and becoming much closer to the average. In the year ending in September 2022, the family incident rate per 100,000 population in Port Phillip was 1377.7, close to the Victorian average of 1387.9.
- In the year ending September 2022, there were 1422 total family violence incidents in Port Phillip, an increase of 3 per cent from 2021, which had 1380 incidents. This is also an increase from 1013.8 incidents that occurred in 2018.
- It should be noted that it is estimated that only 25 per cent of family violence incidents are reported to the police. Consequently, this data is unlikely to capture the full scale of the issue in the municipality (Crime Statistics Agency, 2022).

### How are some groups in our community particularly affected by safety concerns?

- In the year ending September 2022 in Port Phillip, almost 80 per cent of alleged offender incidents were perpetrated by males. People aged 45+ were the prevalent cohort of alleged offenders. Out of total victim reports that exclude unknown age or sex, approximately 34 per cent (2653) were female, 46 per cent (3567) were male and 20 per cent (1579) were organisations (Crime Statistics Agency, 2022).
- According to the 2016 Personal Safety Survey (PSS) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, men are most likely to be physically assaulted in public by a male stranger, whereas the majority of violence against women occurs in the woman's own home and is perpetrated by a man they know (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).
- Women report a lower sense of safety and security than men (City of Port Phillip, 2020).
- According to the 2015 VicHealth Indicators Survey, people with disability in Victoria "were only half as likely to feel safe walking alone during the day as people without disability" (VicHealth, 2018). In Australia, men with a disability experience higher levels of physical violence than men without a disability, while women with a disability experience higher levels of partner and sexual abuse than women without a disability (Krnjacki, Emerson, Llewellyn, & Kavanagh, 2015).
- While there are no significant differences in perceptions of safety walking alone during the day or night between non-heterosexual and heterosexual Victorians, lesbian, gay and bisexual Victorians reported lower general wellbeing, resilience and life satisfaction, which is "intimately connected to their sense of safety in their community" (VicHealth, 2015).
- A resilience survey undertaken with eleven schools showed that one of the key strengths for young people was safety at home, at school, and in the community (Resilient Youth Australia, 2019).



- It is recognised that Australia-wide, Indigenous communities experience strained relationships with the police and authorities, where efforts towards reconciliation are ongoing. This can impact how safe Indigenous people feel in the community, as they may feel targeted or unsafe around police authorities.

### Current impacts on community safety?

- It could be said that the rise in cost of living and inflation means that some people may choose to engage in criminal acts to gather goods and resources, particularly in retail settings. This could be seen in particularly in lower socio-economic groups, however could be perpetrated by all.
- In relation to family violence, it can be theorised that the increased cost of living and inflation could increase stress within a family environment, that could result in confrontation or issues that take form in family violence. These financial stresses may increase the difficulty of someone trying to leave a situation involving family violence. They may not be able to support themselves since may usually rely on their partner or family's income, particularly when children are involved.
- Additionally, currently there are no restrictions enforced in relation to COVID-19, so this eliminates the public health offences which have been seen in recent years.

### Why is managing community safety important?

- When individuals feel safe within their communities, they are more likely to connect with friends, engage with other community members and experience greater levels of trust and social connection.
- Community safety also influences our physical health and wellbeing by altering how people use, and interact with, the built environment, local amenities, parks and community facilities and their ability to travel to opportunities in the wider community.
- How people perceive safety can influence behaviour and community wellbeing. The positive 'look and feel' of our streets and spaces can contribute to reducing crime and increase feelings of safety. Perceptions of safety are often driven by how people feel about an area or place.

### How are the Commonwealth and State Governments managing community safety?

Federal and State governments are responsible for law and order, public health, social housing, public transport, and emergency management. Victoria Police, in conjunction with the Department for Justice and Community Safety, set the priorities for crime prevention and community safety, and lead on responses to these issues in Port Phillip.



## What is the role of the Port Phillip City Council in creating a safe community?

Increasing community safety requires a focus on the natural and built environment as well as on cultural, social and economic factors that impact on community safety, crime, health and wellbeing. The City of Port Phillip contributes to the safety of the community in a number of ways.

In the first instance, the City of Port Phillip is responsible for using its regulatory functions to promote and maintain safety in our community. This includes:

- Managing waste, graffiti removal, street lighting, footpaths, bike lanes, parks, traffic speeds and road design, parking, and recreational spaces in public areas. Use planning controls to ensure the safety of buildings and infrastructure and regulate their use. For example, licencing and monitoring noise impact in venues.
- Management and permitting of public events and public art.
- Promoting responsible pet ownership.
- Establishing outdoor alcohol restrictions in partnership with Victoria Police who are responsible for enforcing.

In addition to our regulatory responsibilities, the City of Port Phillip develops policies and programs that strengthen the community to prevent crime, injury and ill-health, and to foster positive social change. Our priority areas include:

- **Creating Safe Spaces** that are vibrant and welcoming environments that can be enjoyed by all, both day and night. In particular, we work with our partners to increase actual and perceived safety in public places through design and management of our streets, network of walking paths and bike corridors, entertainment precincts, the foreshore, parks and outdoor spaces, lighting, graffiti and waste removal and sensitive CCTV.
- **Building Resilience:** We work with local businesses, organisations, and community members to create a welcoming, inclusive, resilient community that supports the most vulnerable to feel and be safe.
- **Healthy Living:** We support our community to realise their health potential through promoting social connectedness without a focus on alcohol. We also contribute to the effort to reduce alcohol and drug-related harm.

In addition to this, Port Phillip has a role to play in:

- Tracking crime trends and community perceptions of safety to identify priorities and emerging risks
- Evaluating CCTV, undertaking safety audits and implementing crime prevention measures such as environmental design
- Working collaboratively with government agencies, community service organisations, community members and traders to identify and respond to priority issues



- Encouraging residents, visitors, and local traders to take shared responsibility maintaining a safe community by respecting public spaces, disposing of waste appropriately, managing pets responsibly, being courteous toward fellow community members and reporting crime.

### Who are our partners?

Community safety is the responsibility of all levels of government, community service organisations, business owners and community members. Safety is determined by a range of complex environmental, social and economic factors. No one organisation can solve complex safety issues in isolation. The City of Port Phillip works collaboratively to continually improve safety in our community.

- Better Health Network (formerly Star Health)
- Victoria Police
- Transport Accident Commission
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (formerly part of the Department of Health and Human Services)
- Department of Justice and Community Safety
- Community Organisations
- Community Members

### What may change over the next five years?

Uncertainty about the economic future, tied with inflation and the rise in cost of living, means that crime could potentially increase. This could either be in the form of increased theft, e.g. of homes, bicycles or goods in retail stores.

In regard to family violence, increased stress within households due to these external financial pressures may result in more instances of abuse. It may also mean increased difficulty for abuse survivors to leave their situations, as they may not be able to financially support themselves.

While Australia has entered a 'COVID-normal' phase of the pandemic, restrictions could potentially put back in force in response to waves or rises in cases, or the development of new variants or subvariants. While it appears unlikely, these restrictions could be reinstated, that would likely increase public health offences as was seen throughout 2020-22.

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